

“GOD IS WITH US”: THE TEMPLE IN LUKE-ACTS

Cyprian Robert Hutcheon

In a 1986 essay, Fr John Breck highlighted the Orthodox tradition’s insistence upon the fundamental unity of scriptural proclamation and liturgical enactment. In liturgy, he asserted, the proclaimed “word” and the sacramental “sign” are so inextricably bound together that one must “affirm . . . the ‘kerygmatic’ character of the Sacrament and the ‘sacramental’ character of the Word.”¹ Fr Breck finds a powerful expression of this “Word-Sign” unity in Luke’s account of the resurrection appearance at Emmaus (Lk 24:13–35). As in certain other resurrection appearances of Jesus (e.g., Jn 20:14, 21:4), the two Emmaus-bound disciples “were kept from recognizing him” (Lk 24:16). As discussion ensued between them and the risen Jesus, his messianic exegesis of the words of “Moses and all the prophets” (vv.25–27) so moved them that they later wondered at how “their hearts [had] burned within them” (v.32), yet they *still* failed to recognize their Lord. Only at table, when Jesus “took, blessed, broke and gave” bread to the two disciples as he had done at the Last Supper, did Jesus finally become “known to them in the breaking of the bread” (v.35). Only when Word and sacramental Sign were combined did revelation occur.

This “sacramental approach” to the disclosure of God’s Word, I would maintain, is integral to Luke’s theological method, and can provide us with a fruitful approach to this paper’s topic. I believe that “Temple” is a “sign” of critical importance for trying to understand Luke’s theology, as I shall try to demonstrate in my paper. It can also be argued that “Temple” provides us with a convenient

1 John Breck, *The Power of the Word in the Worshiping Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), 13.

“organizing principle” for understanding and simplifying the structure of both Luke and Acts, particularly if one accepts the equation of “Temple” with “Jerusalem.” Thus, Luke’s Gospel begins and ends in the Temple, as does the ministry of Jesus, and the construct “Temple/Jerusalem” allows the Gospel of Luke to be divided neatly into three principal parts.² These are: Lk 1–2 (the infancy and childhood narratives which begin and end in the Jerusalem Temple); Lk 3:1–19:27 (which deals mainly with the Galilean ministry of Jesus and his journey to Jerusalem); and lastly, Lk 19:28–24:52 which records Jesus’ ministry in the Temple, and his death, resurrection, and ascension in Jerusalem. It might equally be asserted that “Temple” provides a literary *inclusio* for the book of Acts as well. Acts begins in Jerusalem, the Temple-city (and the “action” soon shifts to the Temple itself in chapters 3–7); it closes with a quotation from Isaiah 6:9–10, drawn from proto-Isaiah’s “Temple vision.”³

In approaching my topic, it will be my task (following my “Word-Sign” construct) to try and discover what is “the sacramental Word” being manifested by “the Temple as Sign” in Luke-Acts. This may not be a straightforward exercise because, though many authors agree that “the Temple” is important in Luke-Acts, there is little agreement as to its meaning or importance for Luke and his readership. In surveying (and then reflecting) on the Temple in Luke-Acts, we shall begin with some general remarks about the Lucan writer, his works, and the prominence of “Temple” in them.

2 This tripartite structure is suggested by Francis D. Weinert in “The Meaning of the Temple in Luke-Acts,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 11 (1981) 85–86.

3 For this latter observation, I am indebted to Klaus Baltzer, “The Meaning of the Temple in the Lukian Writings,” *Harvard Theological Review* 58 (1965) 277, and Edvin Larsson, “Temple-criticism and the Jewish Heritage,” *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993) 394. J. H. Elliott from a social-scientific perspective understands Luke-Acts as embodying a fundamental opposition between “Temple” and “Household,” with the latter standing for the “values and goals of an inclusive gospel of universal salvation.” Therefore, in Elliott’s analysis, Acts is framed by scenes from households, which stand in contrast to the temple references framing Luke. See J. H. Elliott, “Temple versus Household in Luke-Acts: a Contrast in Social Institutions,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 47 (1991) 88, 92.

Second, we shall proceed to an examination of “Temple” in Luke’s Gospel, focusing on three portions of that text: (1) the infancy-childhood narratives of Luke 1–2; (2) Jesus’ entry into and ministry in the Temple [Lk 19:28–21:38]; and (3) the death of Jesus on the cross in Lk 23:44–49. Third, we shall examine the significance of “Temple” in Acts, concentrating mainly on the figure and speech of Stephen in Acts 6–7. Finally, we shall attempt to formulate some thoughts about the possible contemporary relevance of Lucan Temple theology.

Luke-Acts and the Temple: Introductory Perspectives

It is a matter of near-universal agreement amongst scholars that the anonymous authors of Luke and Acts are, in fact, the same person—in all probability a Gentile, possibly from Syrian Antioch, perhaps a physician by profession (Col 4:14) and writing some of the finest Greek in the New Testament [NT]. Since the time of Irenaeus of Lyons (second century), it has been traditional to identify the author as Luke, the companion of Paul during his imprisonment in Rome, who is mentioned three times in the Pauline corpus (Col 4:14, Philem 24 and 2 Tim 4:11).⁴ Based on internal considerations, the likely date of composition of Luke-Acts is thought to be AD 80–85, since the author presupposes the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70), but shows no knowledge of the persecution in the latter part of the reign of the Emperor Domitian who ruled from AD 81–96. Luke’s audience is presumed to have been primarily Gentile; Robert Karris suggests that it likely included many “well-to-do members who [were] rethinking their missionary thrusts in a hostile environment”⁵ and who were preoccupied with internal and external controversies. However, Bradley Chance cautions against a too-tight identification of Luke with a specific community settled in a particular locale, basing his contention on internal evidence from Luke-Acts which supports a

⁴ Justin Taylor, “Acts of the Apostles,” in *The International Bible Commentary*, ed. Wm. R. Farmer (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 1506.

⁵ Rob’t J. Karris, “The Gospel According to Luke,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown *et al.* (London: G. Chapman, 1995), 675–76.

picture of the third Evangelist as a “man on the move.”⁶

In his already-cited introduction to Luke's Gospel in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Karris summarizes some pertinent characteristics of the Lucan documents which we may briefly recapitulate here. Luke's *literary sources* may conveniently be depicted as three-fold: Mark's Gospel, the hypothetical sayings source “Q” and the author's own “special materials” (which some like to refer to as “L” and about which we can only speculate). He uses these sources in an ingenious and creative manner; for example, Luke adopts some sixty percent of Mark, but by omitting redundancies, by amplifying Mark's theme of the “journey to Jerusalem” with materials from “Q” and “L,” and by cleverly redacting Mark's account of Jesus' last days, he moulds his sources to serve his own theological purposes. The various sources and traditions in Luke-Acts are knit into a cohesive *literary structure* through Luke's employment of a number of *literary devices*. These include: “promise and fulfillment” (e.g., Simeon's promises in Lk 2:34); parallelism (e.g., between Stephen and Jesus); inclusions (e.g., the “Temple” references with which Luke and Acts begin and end); the utilization of “theological geography” (e.g., “the message” journeys from Galilee to Jerusalem to the “ends of the earth” [Acts 1:8]); and the use of certain recurring “themes” such as “prayer,” or (of interest to us) “the Temple.”

The *theology* of Luke-Acts could obviously form the subject for a lengthy paper; in this present work, we shall limit ourselves to the attempt to discover what role is played by “the Temple” in Lucan theology. Before embarking on this task, however, it may be useful to identify certain key elements of the general theological *schema* out of which Luke is operating, something which Karris does for us when he writes as follows:

The key question [for Luke] deals with theodicy: If God has not been faithful to the promises made to God's elect people and has allowed their holy city and Temple to be destroyed,

⁶ See J. Bradley Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (Macon, GA: Mercer and Peeters, ca.1988), 144–45.

what reason do Gentile Christians, who believe in this God, have to think that God will be faithful to promises made to them? Luke's answer takes the form of the kerygmatic story, which we call Luke-Acts. In it Luke demonstrates that God through Jesus was faithful to promises made to Israel, but in an unexpected way to include Gentiles, the unclean, the poor, women, Samaritans, rich toll collectors and assorted other outcasts as well as elect people who are repentant of their initial rejection of Jesus, God's prophet and Chosen One. This Israel is called reconstituted Israel. In it is found continuity with the old. ...

... Luke wages theological battles on two fronts. Internally he engages in polemic against Jewish Christians who seek to apply overly strict entrance requirements to those who want to join reconstituted Israel. ... The main external problems which Luke's communities face are those of harassment, primarily from local Jewish synagogue leaders. ... As the sermons of Peter, Stephen, and Paul further indicate, these problems involve the interpretation of Scripture, especially how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises.⁷

In his narrative, Luke mentions "Temple" more than any other NT writer, using three different Greek expressions to do so. In common with most NT authors (other than the "Seer" of the Apocalypse), Luke's preferred word for the Jerusalem Temple as a whole (i.e., including its buildings, precincts, and courts) is *to hieron*; it appears fourteen times in his Gospel and twenty-five times in Acts, giving a total occurrence greater than that for the rest of the NT books combined. *Ho naos*, the Septuagint's preferred term for the Jerusalem Temple, is used relatively sparsely in the NT as a whole; it is most typically employed when speaking of the sanctuary proper (i.e., the priestly places) or when referring to a spiritualized "heavenly sanctuary." There are four occurrences of *naos* in Luke's Gospel—three when speaking of Zechariah's priestly service in Lk 1, and one when describing the rending of the Temple veil just before Jesus' death [Lk 23:45]; there are two instances of *naos*

⁷ Karris, 676.

in Acts, at least one of which refers (surprisingly) to pagan shrines. Lastly, the term *ho oikos (tou Theou)*, as noted by John Elliott, “appears possibly four times in Luke and once in Acts, all in contexts of conflict or censure.”⁸

Based on these findings, it seems reasonable to assume that “Temple” must play an important role in Lucan texts and theology. Many commentators have made precisely this point, but beyond their noting the obvious, there is little agreement among them regarding either Luke’s attitude towards the Temple or its “meaning” in Luke-Acts. For example, while Luke’s attitude to the Temple is judged by Weinert to be highly positive, Elliott assesses it as extremely negative, and P. F. Esler occupies a position somewhere between the two.⁹ In reviewing scholarly efforts to understand Luke and his Temple theology, Joel Green bemoans the fact that “nowhere have scholarly instincts to assume in Luke a Pauline or Markan voice been more apparent.”¹⁰ Thus, as we embark upon a more detailed study of some significant Lucan “Temple texts,” we need to be aware that this is a contentious area around which there are few signs of scholarly consensus.

The Temple in Luke’s Gospel: A Study of Three Texts

If we follow Weinert’s earlier-mentioned suggestion (see note 2) and divide Luke’s Gospel into three parts based on his treatment of “the Temple,” we discover that most of Luke’s mentions of “Temple” are to be found at either end of his narrative. Thus, the

⁸ Elliott, “Temple versus Household,” 95–96, provides a convenient résumé of Lucan Temple terminology. See also O. Michel, “Naos,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol IV, 882–88.

⁹ See Weinert, “Meaning of the Temple,” 89, as well as his article “Luke, Stephen, and the Temple in Luke-Acts,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 17 (1987) 90. For Elliott, see “Temple versus Household,” 88–90, as well as his shorter article, “Household and Meals vs. Temple Purity Replication Patterns in Luke-Acts,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 21 (1991) 107, which deals mainly with the Peter-Cornelius pericope of Acts 10:1–11:18. For Philip Francis Esler’s conclusions on Luke’s attitude to the Temple, see P. F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 161–63.

¹⁰ Joel B. Green, “The Demise of the Temple as ‘Culture Center’ in Luke-Acts,” *Revue Biblique* 101 (1994) 495–96.

uniquely Lucan, intertwined accounts of the early years of John the Baptist and Jesus, which comprise most of Lk 1–2, contain about one-third of the Gospel's Temple references, while over half are to be found in the book's last six chapters which deal with Jesus' Temple ministry in Jerusalem, and with his death, resurrection and ascension in the holy city. Luke 3–18, the book's "heart," contains few clear Temple references and none which could be viewed as critical for an appreciation of "the Temple in Luke-Acts." Thus, we shall limit ourselves to consideration of: (1) parts of Lk 1–2; (2) selected portions of Lk 19:28–21:38; and (3) Jesus' death in Lk 23:44–49, paying particular attention to verse 45b, the rending of the Temple veil.

Chapters 1–2

These chapters (aside from the "preface" of 1:1–4) begin and end in the Temple; they comprise a series of seven pericopes which are intricately interwoven both as theology and as literature, through abundant use of such devices as parallelism, inclusion, and fulfillment. Raymond Brown suggests that they may well have been composed as an afterthought, modeled on Hellenistic *prooimia*, and that the Gospel's original beginning (as for the Gospels of Mark and John) was the ministry of John the Baptist in Lk 3. Availing himself of a number of skillfully edited "Lucan" and "pre-Lucan" traditions, the third Evangelist presents a "transitional narrative" which, Brown believes, introduces certain Lucan "themes" (e.g., God's faithfulness to his promises), while serving as a bridge between the history of Israel (as found in the OT) and the history of Jesus contained in the body of Luke's Gospel.¹¹

Various schemata (summarized by Brown on pp. 248–52 of *The Birth of the Messiah*) have been proposed to try and "rationalize" the internal structure of Lk 1–2, but it seems obvious that its core is based on presenting an asymmetrical parallelism between John the Baptist and Jesus by means of a comparison of the annunciations of

11 See Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 240–43.

their conceptions and the narratives of their births. This core parallelism, suggests Brown, was amplified by the addition of the Lucan canticles, and of narratives including Jesus' presentation in the Temple on his fortieth day, and his being found there as a boy of twelve. From the standpoint of our interest in "Luke and Temple," we will briefly study these latter two pericopes but only after we have examined in some detail what Raymond Brown calls the "annunciation diptych" which first introduces the Lucan theme of "Temple."

The annunciation narrative about John the Baptist (Lk 1:5–25) stresses God's faithfulness to promises by recapitulating the pattern of various OT annunciation scenes (e.g., Isaac in Gen 17:19, Josiah in 1 Kgs 13:2), namely: an announcement of the birth of a special child, his naming and the foretelling of his destiny. The priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth (vv.5–7) are a righteous, but barren, elderly couple, reminiscent of OT couples who gave birth unexpectedly to "children of the promise" such as Isaac (Gen 21:1–7) and Samuel (1 Sam 1–2). One day (vv.8–13), while assisting at the evening sacrifice in the Temple (*naos*, i.e., the *hekhal*), Zechariah is visited by an "angel of the Lord" in a scene which (suggests Karris) is subtly reminiscent of the eschatologically-charged visions of Dan 9–10. The angel (vv.13–17) prophesies that Elizabeth will conceive and bear a son, John, who "will be great before the Lord" and "filled with the Holy Spirit." To Zechariah's query: "How shall I know this?" (v.18), the angel identifies himself as Gabriel, sent to bear "good news" (*euaggelisasthai*), and tells Zechariah that he will be given "a sign"; he "will be unable to speak ... until these things come to pass" (vv.19–20). The waiting people somehow perceive that Zechariah, like Isaiah, has seen a "vision in the Temple" (v.22) so that the Temple, the "abode of God," is identified as a place of divine revelation where the "good news" of impending salvation is received from God. "It is within the temple, [a] segregating cultural force, that God's integrating message of salvation is revealed," observes Joel Green.¹² However, the "Temple as

12 Green, 512.

locus of revelation” will not really come into its own until Jesus, as “Lord of the Temple,” “occupies” it and fully expounds the “good news” there (Lk 19:45–21:38).

The two parallel, but contrasting, halves of the “annunciation diptych” are linked by the figure of Gabriel. He is sent this time (1:26–38), not to a member of the male clerical caste in the magnificent surroundings of the “house of the Lord,” but to Mary, one of the *anawim*, a humble Jewish maiden living in an obscure Galilean hill-town. Here one catches an early glimpse of Luke’s vision of a “reconstituted Israel” in which both a righteous priest and an inconspicuous woman will have equal places. As with the forecast of John’s birth, there is an announcement, a name (Jesus) and a destiny. However, Jesus will be not merely a Spirit-filled man but “Son of the Most High” (v.32), and his virginal conception by Mary will be even more extraordinary than John’s conception by his erstwhile barren mother. Like Zechariah, Mary inquires: “How shall this be?” (v.34) and receives an astounding answer. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow (*episkiasei*) you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (v.35).

This rare Greek verb, *episkiazo* (“overshadow”), is used only five times in the NT—once here, three times in the synoptic accounts of the “overshadowing cloud” on the mount of transfiguration, and once to describe Peter’s healing shadow in Acts 5:15. In the Septuagint [LXX], the word is equally obscure, being used only four times, most notably (for our purposes) in Ex 40:35 where we read (RSV) that “Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting (LXX: ‘*skene tou marturiou*’) because the cloud abode upon (LXX: ‘*epeskiazen*’) it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (LXX: ‘*skene*’).” Almost identical language is used concerning Solomon’s Temple in 1 Kgs 8:10b–13 (JB): “The cloud filled the Temple of Yahweh (LXX: ‘*oikos*’), and because of the cloud the priests could no longer perform their duties: the glory of Yahweh filled Yahweh’s Temple. And Solomon said: ‘Yahweh has chosen to dwell in the thick cloud. Yes, I have built you a dwelling, a place for you to live in forever.’”

It is apparent that the authors of these two passages envisaged God's dwelling (be it "*skene*" [tent/tabernacle] or "*oikos*" [Temple]) as covered by and filled with the "overshadowing cloud" of God's "glory" (Heb: "*kabod*," Gr: "*doxa*"). Hence, when Gabriel tells Mary that the "power (*dynamis*) of the Most High will overshadow you," we are certainly dealing with "Temple language." In some mysterious way, the presence of God (whether conceived as *dynamis*, *doxa*, *kabod*, or *shekinah*) will come to "dwell" in her, just as God was believed to dwell in the Jerusalem Temple. It is unclear (to me at least) whether this densely-packed metaphorical language envisages Mary's son or Mary herself as (in some sense) "Temple," but it is surely only a small step from this image to the lush Marian hymnography of later centuries. Suffice it to say that Luke wants us to begin to understand that in a new and radical way, God's dwelling with human beings will no longer be limited to "houses made by hands" (Acts 7:48, 17:24).

To complete our consideration of Temple themes in Luke 1–2, we shall deal briefly with the two "Temple pericopes" of Luke 2: the "presentation in the Temple" (2:22–40) and the story of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple (2:41–52). One must start by asking what Lucan purposes (either narrative or theological) were served by Luke's having the forty-day old infant Jesus being brought into the Temple by his parents. Luke's ostensible reason—to fulfill the Jewish law of purification for women after childbirth (Lev 12:6–8), and the law of redemption of the firstborn (Ex 13:2, 13)—is contradicted by his statement that Jesus' parents "brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord" (v.22), something not mandated by the Law of Moses. More likely, in crafting this narrative, Luke had in mind prophecies such as Mal 3:1a ("I send my messenger to prepare the way before me [a prophecy of John the Baptist], and the *Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple*") and Dan 9:24 ("Seventy weeks are decreed concerning your people and your holy city . . . to put an end to sin . . . and to anoint a most holy [one]").¹³ One also finds here many elements in

¹³ Karris, 680, points out how the figure of seventy weeks (= 490 days) can be ac-

common with the story of the young Samuel's presentation and dedication to the Lord as recounted in 1 Sam 1:21–28. Assembling all these ingredients, one comes up with a rather neat "Lucan *inclusio*" by which the beginning and end of the infancy narratives of Lk 1:2–2:40 bring together two elderly couples (Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna), the Temple, and motifs recalling the story of Samuel and the prophecies of Daniel. The narrative of the coming into the world of the "Lord of the Temple" appropriately starts and finishes in the "house of the Lord" which he will later occupy.

It may then be asked what connection there is (if any) between this Temple setting and what follows: an encounter with two elderly prophets (Simeon and Anna) and the utterance of two oracles by Simeon (vv. 29–32, the "*Nunc Dimittis*," and vv. 34b–35), connected only by Simeon's intervening blessing of the infant in verse 34a. Raymond Brown summarizes this connection very nicely when he writes the following:

The Law, the prophetic Spirit, and the Temple cult have all come together to set the scene for the greatness of Jesus. The one who is called "holy" (1:35) has come to the holy place of Israel, and *he begins to embody much of what was associated with the Temple*. It was predicted that in the last days the Gentiles would come streaming to the mountain of the house of the Lord to be taught His ways (Is 2:2–3; Micah 4:1). Now in that house Jesus is proclaimed as a salvation made ready in the sight of all the peoples: "A light to be a revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:31–32). It was the proudest boast of the Temple theologians that the glory of God dwelt in the sanctuary (1 Kgs 8:10–11; Ezek 44:4); and now as Simeon stands before that sanctuary, he proclaims Jesus to be a glory for God's people Israel.¹⁴

counted for by six months of Elizabeth's pregnancy before Mary conceived (= 180 days), plus nine months of Mary's pregnancy (= 270 days), plus forty days between Jesus' birth and his presentation, making a total of 490 days.

¹⁴ Brown, 453; italics added for emphasis. Besides this quotation, I have used Brown's chapter on the presentation (pp. 435–69) as the source for most of my observations on Lk 2:22–40.

Constraints of time preclude our giving any but the scantiest attention to the final Temple pericope of Luke 2:41–52. The boy Jesus journeys with Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Jerusalem for Passover, and then “goes missing”; “after three days” (surely a resurrection cipher!), his frantic parents find him “in his Father’s house” (v.49), “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (v.46). Suffice it to say that this passage (which Brown believes was a later addition by Luke to his original annunciation and nativity “diptychs”) performs three useful functions in Luke’s narrative. First, it provides one final “Temple inclusion” to close the narrative unit of Lk 1:5–2:52. Second, it functions literally as a “bridge passage” (Karris) between the magnificent *prooimion* to Luke’s Gospel and the account of Jesus’ adult ministry which is about to begin. It might even be argued that this passage is the “true beginning” of Jesus’ ministry, because he not only listens to the teachers of Israel, he asks them questions and provokes amazement by “his understanding and his answers” (v.47). Lastly, it foreshadows Jesus’ later “journey to Jerusalem” (Lk 9:51–19:27) when he will finally “come into his own” in the Jerusalem Temple, a subject to which we shall now turn our attention.

Luke 19:28–21:38: Jesus “occupies” the Jerusalem Temple

Thus far, we have seen in Luke a very positive attitude towards the Temple; it is God’s abode in which God reveals himself as faithful to his promises. There are certainly hints of an impending “change” in its status with the coming of Jesus, but we are left to wonder, in effect, “where to from here?” Using our Word-Sign construct, we must still discern the Word of which “Temple” is a concrete Sign.

In assessing Luke’s “Gentile perspective” on an already-destroyed Temple, various possibilities have been entertained by scholars. Thus, it has been asserted that, for Luke, the Temple was ultimately of negative value: either it needed to be destroyed because it had become an impediment to God’s dealings with

humans, or it was of no lasting significance because it was superseded by the coming of Jesus. Conversely, other critics discern a generally positive attitude in Luke: the Temple has lasting value in the economy of salvation, but this value has had to be universalized, either by spiritualizing it or by seeing it as eschatological. It therefore behooves us to attend carefully to what Luke says in our present pericope, as well as in Lk 23:44–39 and Acts 6–7.

This pericope deals with Jesus' Jerusalem ministry from his Entry on “Palm Sunday” until his celebration of the Passover with his disciples. It corresponds exactly to chapters 11–13 of Mark's Gospel on which it is obviously based. Luke has skillfully edited his Marcan source to achieve certain theological goals. These goals may become more evident if we examine some of the specific redactional changes of Mark which Luke has effected.

First, the Lucan Jesus (compared to Mk 11:11) never actually enters Jerusalem until the Last Supper; instead he goes directly from the Mount of Olives (v.37) to the Temple (v.45), pausing on the way to weep from afar over the impending destruction of Jerusalem (vv.41–44), using language redolent of Is 29:3, Jer 6:6, Ezek 4:2 and Hos 10:14–15. Second, by eliminating the cursing (Mk 11:12–14) and withering (Mk 11:20–26) of the fig tree, Luke depicts a single movement by which Jesus enters and cleanses the Temple and begins teaching there, all in the space of three verses (Lk 19:45–47). Third, the Lucan cleansing of vv.45b–46 is a very gentle, non-violent act compared to its Marcan prototype (Mk 11:15–17), and the Lucan version of the quotation from Is 56:7 (“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples”) omits “for all peoples,” rather surprising in view of Luke's reputed universalism.

How can we put all this together? Hans Conzelmann suggests the following:

In Luke it is not a question of the eschatological end of the Temple, but of its cleansing. Jesus prepares it as somewhere he can stay, and from now on he occupies it as a place belonging

to him. The Cleansing is no longer an eschatological sign, but a means of taking possession.¹⁵

This would explain, for example, why Luke's cleansing is a rather tame one, and why he omits "for all peoples" from the Isaiah quote, since this cleansing is *not* a sign of the end-times when the Gentiles will come to God's mountain. Rather, suggests Baltzer (expanding on Conzelmann's thesis and pointing out Luke's "Mount of Olives-Temple construct"), can we not see here hints of Ezekiel 43 in which the "glory [*kabod*] of the Lord" re-enters the Temple from the Mount of Olives to the east (Ezek 43:1–5), and the sanctuary is accordingly cleansed of abominations (Ezek 43:8–9). Says Baltzer: "All this would mean, from an Old Testament point of view, that in Luke, when Jesus enters the Temple or is in the temple, *the Temple is really the Temple*. To state it more precisely, Jesus and the *kabod* are connected."¹⁶

We may also note, with Weinert, how Luke differs from Mark in avoiding certain negative portrayals of the Temple. Thus, Luke does not portray the Temple as a "locus of opposition" to Jesus; his cleansing of the Temple is directed simply at "those who sold" and not at the Temple *cultus* as fostering materialistic abuses; he does not make the Temple (whose destruction he foretells in 21:5–6) a particular object of God's apocalyptic anger (as Mark seems to do in Mk 13:14–20); and, finally, he is careful to avoid any inference that Jesus is opposed to the Temple (going so far as to omit Mark's report of allegations that Jesus had threatened to destroy the Temple).¹⁷

Thus, one might fairly summarize Luke's theological position thus far as one which discerns the holiness of the Jerusalem Temple as being fulfilled by the coming of Jesus, without the need for denigration or destruction of what has gone before. We must now ex-

15 Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 77–78.

16 Baltzer, 275; italics added for emphasis. There is further evidence of Baltzer's "Mount of Olives-Temple construct" in Lk 21:37 which situates Jesus in the Temple every day, but back on Olivet at night.

17 Weinert, "Meaning of the Temple," 86–87.

amine this conclusion in the light of Luke's treatment of the rending of the Temple curtain as Jesus dies.

Luke 23:45: "The curtain of the Temple was torn in two"

The narrative unit of which this verse forms part is defined by the period of darkness during Jesus' crucifixion which lasted from noon ("the sixth hour") until his death at the ninth hour (i.e., about 3:00 PM). Luke's principal source appears to have been Mk 15:33–41 which he redacted and embellished with materials either original to him or from an unknown source; some scholars suggest that he might have used a non-Marcan continuous passion narrative.¹⁸ The most obvious and significant alteration of Mark made by Luke is his transposition of the "tearing of the Temple curtain (*katapetasma*)" from its Marcan position *after* Jesus has died to its place in Lk 23:45b *before* Jesus expires (v.46b). Other significant Lucan changes to Mark's version include: the added detail in v.45a of a solar eclipse as an explanation for the darkness; a change in the words of the dying Jesus from Ps 22:1 ("My God, my God . . .") to Ps 31:5 ("into your hands I commit my spirit"); a change in the centurion's reaction at Jesus' death to an expression of his innocence, rather than of his divinity; and the addition of the detail in v.48 of the contrition of the assembled crowds.

What have scholars made of Luke's transposition of the tearing of the *katapetasma* to a position anterior to Jesus' death? All too often, points out Green (p.500), this detail is still interpreted by critics (in a decidedly Marcan spirit!) as a portent of the Temple's destruction, an interpretation which Green maintains is contradictory to Luke's overall Temple theology. Thus, for example, Andrea Spatafora can write in his recent book that "the author of the Third Gospel clearly indicates the end of the temple in the announcement of the destruction of the sanctuary in the eschatological discourse *and in the tearing of the veil*" (emphasis mine).¹⁹ According

18 See Green, 496; I am indebted to him for much of what follows. To reduce footnote citations, I will make page citations from Green directly in the text.

19 Andrea Spatafora, *From the "Temple of God" to God as the Temple* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1997), 100.

to Green, it is necessary both to account for the changed position of the “torn veil” in the narrative, and to do so in a manner consonant with “the larger portrayal of the temple in Luke-Acts” (p.503). Incorporating insights from other authors, Green proposes a synthesis and interpretation which strikes one as satisfying, particularly because it attempts to attend carefully to the co-text of Lk 23:45b.

The darkness of Lk 23:44–45a (reinforced by Luke’s addition of the genitive absolute *tou heliou eklipontos*) marks the arrival of the “last days” which for Luke were ushered in—not by Jesus’ “Entry to Jerusalem” (which only took place at the Last Supper)—but by his rejection and execution. This imagery of “portents in the heavens” and “the sun turning to darkness” (based on Joel 2:30–31) is explicitly eschatologized in Acts 2:17–21 where Luke cites the same text (with its co-text in Joel 2:28–32), and adds the pregnant opening phrase *en tais eschatais hemerais*. These “last days” for Luke (and Joel) are, more specifically, the “time of the Spirit” when “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord [i.e., Jew or Gentile] will be saved” (Acts 2:21; Joel 2:32a), in fulfillment of Simeon’s prophecy (Lk 2:31–32) in the *Nunc Dimitissi*.

If the darkness-filled events of Jesus’ death, recounted in Lk 23:44–49, are indeed the beginning of the *eschaton*, one might scrutinize the text for any intimations of a coming together of Jew and Gentile. Green points out how in Mark, when Jesus dies in Mk 15:37, there ensues an exaggeration of the separation of Jew and Gentile. For Jews who reject Jesus, his death leads to the symbolic destruction of their holy place when the Temple veil is torn (v.38); on the other hand for Gentiles represented by the centurion, Jesus’ death opens the possibility of faith in him as a true son of God (v.39). One may contrast this Marcan *separation* of Jew and Gentile with Luke’s narrative, where the unjustified death of Jesus *unites* Jew and Gentile by evoking similar (if not identical) reactions. The Gentile centurion, representative of the Roman executioners, exclaims “this man was innocent” (23:47), while the Jewish crowds (who so recently clamored for Jesus’ condemnation in Lk 23:21) are convicted of their error and return home “beating their breasts”

(a phrase also used to describe the humble tax collector in Lk 18:13). Both Jew and Gentile reveal by their attitudes the possibility of their becoming part of what Karris called “reconstituted Israel.”

In order to make it clear that this unity of Jew and Gentile was a consequence of Jesus’ death (and because he “intended” to portray the Temple as having ongoing “value” for the early church in Acts 3–5), Luke had to ensure that no hint remained of Mark’s implied linkage between Jesus’ death and the destruction of the Jewish Temple. Hence, he moved the “tearing of the curtain” (v.45b) to a spot *prior* to Jesus’ dying (v.46b). Why did he not simply remove this “disagreeable” Marcan detail from his narrative altogether and avoid embarrassment? Here Green’s interpretation becomes (to my mind) truly ingenious. Much and all as Luke is generally positive in his attitudes toward the Temple, he nonetheless recognizes that:

the temple functions as a segregating force, symbolizing socio-religious demarcations between insider and outsider.

The time of the temple is not over. It will serve as place of prayer and teaching. But it is no longer the center around which life is oriented. Rather than serving as the *gathering point for all peoples* under Yahweh [Is 56:7; cf. Lk 19:46], it has now become the *point-of-departure for the mission to all peoples*.²⁰

The Temple must lose its symbolic power as a “segregating force” between Jew and non-Jew if they are to be united in their responses to Jesus’ death. Hence, Luke symbolically demolishes the “dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14) between Gentiles and Jews by narrating that “the curtain of the temple was torn in two” just before Jesus breathes his last. We may now turn to consider how the Lucan Gospel’s portrait of “Temple” is further developed in Acts with a particular view to investigating whether Green’s interpretation of the Temple as “point-of-departure” is valid.

20 Green, 512; italics added for emphasis.

The Temple in Acts: Beyond “Temples Made With Hands” (Acts 7:48)

I have been trying to demonstrate thus far how for Luke, the Temple (already in ruins by his time of writing) is nonetheless a focus of continuity and fulfillment, rather than of disruption and abrogation. Assuming that Luke and Acts are the work of a single author, I find emblematic of Luke's generally irenic approach the smooth manner in which he constructs the transition from one major text to the other. Not surprisingly, “Temple” plays a role here as well, along with the “prefaces” of both books addressed to a certain Theophilus.

At the conclusion of Luke (24:51–53), the risen Jesus blessed his followers and “was parted from them” to return to his Father; they “returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.” Thus, through use of Temple allusions, there is created both an adroit inclusion to conclude the Third Gospel, and an effective bridge to the beginning of Acts. The Gospel opens with the sequence “Temple,” “descent” (i.e., of Gabriel to Zechariah and Mary), and “blessing” (Zechariah's *Benedictus* at Lk 1:67), and closes—in reverse order—with “blessing,” “ascent,” and “Temple.” Though the Book of Acts opens with a brief (if expanded) repetition of the Ascension according to Luke's Gospel (Acts 1:6–11, cf. Lk 24:51), the narrative almost immediately (Acts 1:12) “returns to Jerusalem,” the city of the Temple, and is transferred to the Temple itself in Acts 3–5.

Since I wish to focus on the story of Stephen (Acts 6–7), I shall not devote much time to the general subject of the Temple in Acts other than to highlight certain observations. First, for the early Jewish-Christian community of Jerusalem, the Temple continued to play a significant role according to Acts. It remained a place of service, worship, sacrifice, teaching, and even of divine revelation; Paul, for example, speaking years afterward (in Acts 22:17–21) of the events following his conversion, recalls a vision he had in the Jerusalem Temple shortly after his return from Damascus. Second, as Weinert points out, there existed a “traditional perception of the

Temple as a place of refuge (or distance) from the enemies of God and his people.”²¹ We can recall, for instance, how Jesus was evidently “untouchable” by his enemies during his Temple ministry in Lk 19:45–21:38. Thus, it represents an ominous departure from tradition when, in Acts 4:3, in 5:18, 26, and in 21:30, various apostles are actually arrested within the Temple precincts. Third, after the death of Stephen when a “severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1), most of the Christians were scattered, an event which (according to Acts) proved providential for the future of the infant church since it facilitated the mission to the Gentiles and their inclusion in “reconstituted Israel.” From this perspective, the Temple had become not so much unimportant as inaccessible. However, when Paul returned to Jerusalem from his missionary travels, he “purified himself” and “entered the temple” (Acts 21:26).

By the end of Acts, Paul is in Rome under house arrest. It has become all too clear that the majority of Jews (at least in the Diaspora) are rejecting the message about Jesus, which has now been carried (literally and figuratively) from the Temple in Jerusalem to “the ends of the earth” (as prophesied by Jesus in Acts 1:8). Paul announces that henceforth “this salvation of God [is being] sent to the Gentiles [who] will listen” (Acts 28:29). But in so doing, he still harkens back to the Temple where, centuries before, Isaiah had received a vision in which God inveighed against God’s habitually recalcitrant people (Is 6:9–10, cf. Acts 28:26–27) who, nonetheless, would remain the object of his solicitude. It seems that for Luke, even as he was completing his writings, the Temple somehow remained the “sign” of God’s loving presence with all his people.

Focus: Stephen in Acts 6–7

In completing our assessment of “Temple” in Luke-Acts, we must deal with the figure of Stephen and his speech before the Sanhedrin as recorded in Acts 6–7. Weinert points out how critics who wish to negate Luke’s generally positive assessment of the Temple are

21 Weinert, “Meaning of the Temple,” 86.

inclined to rely on these texts “because [they] represent the closest approximation to an explicit critique of the Temple in Luke-Acts.”²² In particular, the interpretation given to Acts 7:44–50 has tended to be “Temple-critical,” discerning in it a sharply negative comparison between the “tabernacle” (*skene* [v.44] or *skenoma* [v.46]) on the one hand—symbolizing the dynamic mobility of God interacting with his people—and the “Temple” (*oikos* [v.47]) on the other hand typifying the static, “dead” nature of Jewish and Judeo-Christian piety. However, in a recent thought-provoking article, Edvin Larsson has proposed an alternative to this “traditional” exegesis which, if legitimate, would highlight yet another instance of Luke being refracted through Marcan or Pauline lenses.²³ However, before considering these verses and their contexts, we may digress for a moment to look more closely at the rather enigmatic figure of Stephen.

The *sitz-im-leben* for the emergence of Stephen within the Jerusalem community, as least as it is presented by Luke in Acts 6, is a controversy between two factions: the Hellenists and the Hebrews (6:1). While it is generally assumed that the latter are Palestinian-Jewish Christians, the identity of the former is less clear. Scholars have debated whether the *Hellenistai* were Greek-speaking Jewish neo-Christians from the Diaspora or perhaps even from Palestine, or (less likely) early Gentile converts to the new faith.²⁴ For our purposes, their exact origin is unimportant. Of greater relevance for us is Larsson’s assessment (pp. 384–85) that the traditions of Luke 6–7 (and particularly of Stephen’s sermon) represent a con-

22 Weinert, “Luke, Stephen, Temple,” 89.

23 Edvin Larsson, “Temple-Criticism and the Jewish Heritage: Some Reflexions on Acts 6–7,” *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993) 379–95. I am indebted to him for most of what follows where I will cite page references to his article in the body of my text. Larsson acknowledges his own particular debt to Nils Dahl’s essay, “The Story of Abraham in Luke-Acts,” in *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays Presented in Honor of Paul Schubert*, ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 142–48. Larsson comments in a footnote (p. 385) that “Dahl’s stimulating essay, strangely enough, has been neglected in studies of Acts, especially with regard to the prophecy-fulfillment theme.”

24 On this whole question, see the summary in Esler, 135–45.

fluence of three intertwining strands: a Hellenistic-Jewish account of Israel's salvation-history; a Christianized version of this account (probably emanating from Stephen and his adherents); and Luke's own version. Stephen in Acts 6 is one of seven men (anachronistically referred to as "deacons" by later tradition) "of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (6:3), who are selected from among the Hellenists to assist with the distribution of food at the daily communal meals.

From Luke's portrayal of him, Stephen emerges as what Larsson refers to as "an *imitator Christi*" (p. 383) who parallels Jesus in several remarkable ways. First, both Stephen and Jesus experience opposition from and persecution by the Jewish-religious authorities, resulting in their being brought to trial (and executed). At his trial, Stephen is falsely accused of "Temple criticism" through preaching that Jesus will destroy the Temple; this is reminiscent of the false charges brought against Jesus himself according to Mk 14:58, charges which Luke omits from his Gospel account but now (seemingly) alludes to here. Second, both refer to the presence of the Son of man at God's right hand: Jesus (Lk 22:69) in the form of a prophecy, and Stephen in a vision (Acts 7:55b) which appears as the fulfillment of that prophecy. Third, both intercede for their persecutors (Acts 7:60, cf. Lk 23:46); and fourth, both, as they die, commit their spirits to the Lord. Given these similarities between Jesus and Stephen, one could wonder whether Luke might not depict their respective views of the Temple as coinciding. To see whether Luke's Stephen (like his Jesus) treats the Temple in essentially positive terms (as Larsson contends) will be our next task as we proceed to a more detailed consideration of Stephen's speech before the high priest and council (Acts 7:2–53).

Larsson's analysis of that speech is based on its division into two parts. In 7:2–43, we have basically a Hellenistic-Jewish rehearsal of the key events of salvation history, focused on the figures of Abraham (vv. 2–8), Joseph (vv. 9–19), and Moses (vv. 20–43). Thereafter, we come to what Larsson calls the pericope's "central text," Acts 7:44–50, dealing specifically with the Temple, as we saw a moment

ago. The speech, *pace* Larsson, actually has a third portion, vv. 51–53, but this is simply the polemical conclusion to Stephen's discourse in which he rails against the chief priest and elders for their persecution of Jesus in defiance of prophecy. Larsson's key exegetical question (p. 385) is whether the salvation history narrative of 7:2–43 “contains elements which are predetermining the view of the Temple in the central text, 7:44–50.”

Of crucial importance for Larsson's understanding of 7:2–43 is God's prophecy to Abraham in vv.6–7 which allows the whole speech to be interpreted in a context of “prophecy and fulfillment.”²⁵ Verse 6 delineates God as foretelling Abraham that his posterity will be enslaved in a foreign land (as a consequence of Joseph's sojourn there, vv. 9–16). “But,” continues God as depicted by Stephen in verse 7, “I will judge the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out [the Moses narrative of vv.17–43] *and worship me in this place*” (emphasis mine). The latter half of this verse is an adaptation of Ex 3:12 where God tells Moses that “when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain [Horeb].” The adaptation, however, is made to conform with Gen 15:14,16b: “I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out . . . and they shall come back here [i.e., to the promised land of Canaan].” Thus Luke-Stephen in Acts 7:7 has cleverly changed the reference in Ex 3:12 about serving God on Horeb into a foretelling of the establishment by Israel of “true worship” in the Holy Land's very center, “this place” (Acts 7:7b), the Temple where Stephen is now on trial for his life. Acts 7:2–43 becomes a thematic whole, describing sojourns by Israel in foreign lands (led by Abraham and Joseph-Jacob) which lead inexorably to the Jewish people's prophesied return to the Holy Land where, despite all resistance to God and even apostasy (vv. 35–43), they will eventually engage in God-mandated authentic worship.

How does this prophecy impact upon and condition the “central text” of Stephen's speech, Acts 7:44–50? Traditional interpreta-

25 See Dahl, 144–48.

tions have tended to see “authentic worship” as limited to the “tent of witness” or “Tabernacle” (*he skene tou martyriou*) which Moses constructed in the wilderness (v.44a) according to a heavenly prototype (v.44b) and which was then “brought in” by Joshua when Israel entered Canaan (v.45). This tradition continued up until the time of David “who found favor with God” (46a) and asked God’s permission “to find” (*heurein*) a renewed *skenoma* [cognate of *skene*, literally “tent,” translated variously as “dwelling-place” or “habitation”] in which the “house of Jacob”²⁶ could continue to worship (46b). But—continue most “traditional” exegeses—Solomon *instead* chose to erect an *oikos* (the Temple) where God could not possibly dwell because it was *cheiropoietos* (vv.47–48), a characteristic generally associated with pagan shrines. This assessment is justified in Acts 7:49–50 by quoting Is 66:1–2.

However, Larsson asks whether this is what the text actually *says* and intends (directing our attention to a more careful examination of the grammar of the Greek text). In Acts 7:44–48, we have a “string” of four events which deal with the construction or renewal of places of Israelite worship (i.e., those built or maintained by Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon). In the Greek text, the first “event” (construction of Moses’ wilderness *skene*) is joined to the second (Joshua’s bringing of Moses’ *skene* into Canaan), and the second to the third (David’s wish to “find” a *skenoma*) by the conjunction “*kai*” (most commonly translated as “and”). On the other hand, the text connects “event three” (the desired *skenoma* of David) to the fourth (Solomon’s *oikos*) by using the particle “*de*,” which traditional exegesis has generally read disjunctively (as implying “but”), that is, in a manner which serves to emphasize contrast and opposition between what was done by Moses, Joshua, and David (as something “positive” on the one hand) and what Solomon did (as something “negative” on the other).

This interpretation places a lot of “exegetical weight” on reading “*de*” as a disjunction. However, as Larsson (p. 390) points out, the

26 The critical text of the *Greek New Testament* (fourth revised edition, 1993) opts here for the variant reading “*to oiko Iakob*” over the canonical text’s “*to Theo Iakob*.”

particle can also introduce the last of a series “without any connotation of opposition between preceding and subsequent subjects.” If this latter reading is correct, then no contrast is intended between “tent” and Temple” and one could interpret the “negativity” of verse 48 (“the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands”) as applying equally to *both* the Tabernacle and the Temple. In other words, the Temple is not singled out for criticism. And in fact, “criticism” here may be a relative term in any event since the sentiments expressed in Isaiah 66:1–2 are really no different than those which Solomon himself expressed at the dedication of his Temple in 1 Kg 8:27: “Heaven and earth cannot contain thee [O God]; how much less this house which I have built.”

Furthermore, continues Larsson, if Luke-Stephen intended to make a strong contrast between Moses’ “God-commanded” *skene tou martyriou* and Solomon’s Temple as a quasi-pagan *cheiropoietos oikos*, then surely one might expect to catch glimpses of such a contrast in OT texts and later traditions which deal with the tent-Temple issue. This seems not to be the case (e.g., 2 Sam 7 or 1 Kgs 8:14–21); on the contrary, one can even find a Hellenistic-Jewish text which depicts the Temple (*naos*) as a divinely commanded “copy of the holy tent [*skene hagia*] which thou didst prepare from the beginning” (Wis 9:8). Larsson’s overall conclusion is that Acts 7:47–48 is *not* to be read as “Temple-critical” at all, but rather as the fulfillment of the prophecy to Abraham of 7:7 about God’s establishing worship “in this place.” This means that, according to Luke, the early Jerusalem church, whether Judeo-Christian or Hellenist, continued to view the Temple in an essentially positive manner.

Even though we conclude our rather lengthy treatment of “the temple in Luke-Acts” by maintaining that Luke manifests a fundamentally positive attitude toward the Jerusalém Temple, we need to remember that with the persecution and scattering of most of the Jerusalem community after Stephen’s death, the infant church, as depicted by Luke, began its expansion from Jerusalem into “all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Thus,

the Jerusalem Temple (where Stephen was convicted) may be viewed as the starting point for the world-wide extension of the authentic service of God, as was suggested earlier by Green. Larsson ends his article (which I have used so extensively) by highlighting the connection between the speech of Stephen and the overall thrust of Luke-Acts. He writes as follows:

The promise [to Abraham in Acts 7:7], to be sure, pointed to Solomon and the building of the temple. But at the same time it aimed at something after Solomon. Since the service of God was the very center of the promise, it is reasonable that the church's worship of God comes to the fore. It is, in spite of its close relation to the temple, not dependent on it. Luke has shown this already in the first chapters of Acts. His subsequent account of the world-wide mission can be regarded as his description of how the true service of God was established among peoples living far from Jerusalem and its temple.

It is in this world-wide perspective that we have to understand the quotation of Isaiah 66:1. ... It sharply expresses a conviction, which is common Biblical knowledge: the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands. In this context not even *cheiropoietos* needs to be interpreted as expressing a fundamental temple-criticism. It just emphasizes the great difference between human achievements and divine interventions.

The real function of the quotation is ... to declare the fulfillment as a 'going-out.' God and the mission of his church are not bound to the temple, to Jerusalem, to the Holy Land. In Luke's perspective, however, the land of Israel, Jerusalem and the temple form the God-ordained basis for his eschatological fulfillment, the mission of the church.²⁷

I began my paper by suggesting that for Luke and his theology, there is a complex inter-relationship between Word and Sign, and that my efforts in this paper would ultimately be directed toward trying to discover the Word of which "Temple" is a Sign. It is to this task that I will turn in my paper's concluding section.

27 Larsson, 393–94.

The Temple in Luke-Acts: Final Synthesis and Reflections

Based on my studies of the Temple texts of Luke-Acts, and the works of diverse commentators and scholars, I am convinced that “the Temple” can provide us with a hermeneutical key for entering the fascinating realm of Lucan theology and for beginning to unlock some of its hidden treasures. Although I have borrowed heavily from various authors in what follows, the final synthesis is my own, so that its defects must be attributed to my lack of proficiency as a student of the Scriptures and of biblical theology.

I am also aware that, in ways sometimes conscious, more often inadvertent, I may be influenced in the construction of my synthesis by elements from the Byzantine Orthodox tradition in which I have been formed, particularly by its liturgical and iconographic expressions. Both liturgy and iconography are greatly indebted to Luke, which should come as no great surprise. Liturgy and iconography are “epiphanies” of the material, sacramental Word, testified to in Scripture, who “became flesh” and “pitched his tent amongst us [*eskenosen en hemin*]” (Jn 1:14). Luke shares with John a profoundly “material” (but equally “spiritual”) and “sacramental” approach to the disclosure of God’s Word which is integral to his theological method. It is surely no accident that in the developed Christian liturgical calendar (and its concomitant iconographic expression), five major feasts—Annunciation, Nativity, Presentation, Ascension and Pentecost—find their principal scriptural bases in Lucan texts, while Lucan canticles—the *Benedictus*, *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*—form integral parts of the “liturgy of the hours.”

One of the major problematics with which Luke (and the other Evangelists) had to deal was the fact that, as they wrote, the Jerusalem Temple—God’s abode in the midst of his people—had been laid desolate by the armies of Rome. It is easy for us to perceive this as a “false problem,” because for generations Christians have grown used to seeing the figure of Jesus, not the Temple, as the only important “sign” of God’s gracious presence with the People of God. However, the Gospel-writers (and their generation) faced a di-

lemma not dissimilar to that of the Jewish people during and after the Babylonian exile. If the narrative of the events and prophecies of Jewish salvation-history—the *graphai hagiai* of Rom 1:2—continued as a narrative for “reconstituted Israel,” then the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, God’s house, must be a theological problem for Christians as well as for Jews.

Within the New Testament, two broad theological “tendencies” can be detected which tried to “solve” this problem; elements of both can be discerned in most authors. One “tendency” depicts the Temple as “set aside” by the coming of Jesus: either its destruction has occurred because of the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leaders; or (less vindictively) the Temple and its *cultus* have been superseded by “something greater” (e.g., Christ, the church, or believers). The second tendency deals with the Temple more in terms of fulfillment than of abrogation, thereby granting some ongoing normativity to a “Temple concept.” The Judeo-Christians (like their Jewish compatriots) might be assumed to have “eschatologized” the Temple and hoped for its eventual restoration; of this option, the NT canon of scripture has preserved few (if any) traces. Most NT authors instead have “spiritualized” the Temple, so that the construct “Temple-as-abode-of-God” remains, but the locus and expression of this construct lie “outside” or “beyond” the Jerusalem Temple. The only NT expositor of this view in a relatively consistent manner, I would maintain, is Luke.

I would like to propose (and then defend) the hypothesis that Lucan “Temple theology” can be interpreted as an extended “Gentile *midrash*” on Ezekiel’s vision of the return of the *kabod* (LXX: *doxa*) to the purified Temple, as recounted in Ezek 43. This idea is derived from a 1965 article by Klaus Baltzer which I quoted much earlier (notes 3 and 16), and in which, basing himself on Lk 19:28–21:38, he suggests that “Jesus and the *kabod* are connected.” In what follows, I shall be trying to explore and develop Baltzer’s ideas more fully.

Before doing so, however, there are certain terminological matters which require definition and clarification. For purposes of my

synthesis, I will accord a loose “functional equivalency” to the following two groups of terms: *kabod*, *shekinah* (a post-biblical Aramaic concept), *doxa*; and *ruach* (*ha-Kodesh*), *pneuma* (*to hagion*) and *dynamis*. I am aware that each has its own unique history and meanings within Hebrew or Greek thought. Certain of them denote awe and reverence, others strength and power, still others proximity and self-disclosure. However, they share a common attempt (out of necessity) to impart “immediacy” to human experiences of a transcendent and holy God beyond time and space, who is also encountered in sacred history and daily human life. In other words, all of them arose from the need to reconcile the transcendence of the holy God of Israel with that same God’s immanence. Without considering these terms to be interchangeable, we may at least contend that Luke as a Greek-speaking Gentile would have been familiar with their interconnected uses from his reading of Hellenistic Jewish and pagan literature, while probably *not* being acquainted to any degree with the increasingly subtle distinction between *kabod* and *shekinah*.²⁸

Michael Ramsey in his discussion of God’s *kabod* observed that “it is significant that the post-exilic literature, while it dwells upon the presence of the glory [*kabod*] in the ancient tabernacle, nowhere speaks of the glory [*kabod*] as present in the *contemporary* post-exilic temple.”²⁹ This accords with later Talmudic tradition which held that the *shekinah* never inhabited the Second Temple.

28 The Septuagint [LXX] used the Greek *doxa* to translate the Hebrew *kabod* wherever it occurred in the OT, as well as a whole host of other Hebrew words meaning things such as majesty, beauty, and excellence. *Doxa* also acquired a “semantic field” which it shares with *skene*, understood as “dwelling.” About the same time as the LXX, the Aramaic term *shekinah* appeared in intertestamental Jewish literature, having as one of its connotations “resting presence,” a concept close to “dwelling.” When that Aramaic literature was translated by Hellenized Jews, they tended to render *shekinah* by *doxa* making it virtually synonymous with *kabod* in Hellenistic-Jewish literature. *Shekinah*, understood as “charismatic resting” when applied to “inspired” persons, shares meanings with the Hebrew *ruach* whose usual Greek translation is *pneuma*. Finally, in Lk 1:35, we see that *pneuma* and *dynamis* are used in parallel and hence as virtual synonyms.

29 Arthur Michael Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), 18.

In Luke's Gospel, the climax of his presentation of the Jerusalem Temple is evidently Lk 19:28–48 in which Jesus, seemingly in a single “sweeping” movement, descends from the Mount of Olives, enters the Temple (presumably by its eastern gate), cleanses it of its latter-day abominations (the sellers) and then “occupies” it, teaching in the Temple every day (while returning nightly to the Mount of Olives). It seems to me quite reasonable to apprehend here an image based upon (or at least consonant with) Ezekiel's vision of the return of the *kabod* to the Temple as depicted in Ezek 43:1–5. “When Jesus enters the Temple or is in the Temple,” comments Baltzer, “the Temple is really the Temple.”

In the *kabod* language of Ex 40:34–35 and 1 Kg 8:10–13, the *kabod* is closely connected with an “overshadowing” cloud which covered the Tabernacle and the Solomonic Temple and filled them with the glory of the Lord. A cloud also overshadowed (*epeskiazen*) the mount of the Transfiguration (Lk 9:28–36 and parallels); alone of the three Synoptic Gospel-writers, Luke in 9:32b mentions specifically the presence of Jesus' glory (*doxa*), a glory which would soon be manifest differently when he would “accomplish his departure in Jerusalem” (9:31). It is imagery of this kind which imparts such great significance to Gabriel's statement to Mary in Lk 1:35 that “the Holy Spirit (*pneuma hagion*) will come upon you and the power (*dynamis*) of the Most High will overshadow (*episkiassei*) you.” Like the Tabernacle and the Temple and the mount of Transfiguration, Mary was to be “covered” by God's spirit and power, so that her womb would be “filled” by the glory of the Holy One.

After Jesus died and was raised, he “led [his disciples] out as far as Bethany” (Lk 24:50). Back on the Mount of Olives for the last time, Jesus was parted from them in a scene described more fully in Acts 1:9–11. Once more a cloud was present, only this time it took Jesus out of the disciples' sight. Two men in white robes appeared, reminiscent of the two glorified prophets, Moses and Elijah, who stood with Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration, and the “two men in dazzling clothes” (Lk 24:4) who suddenly stood in the Empty Tomb. Before ascending, Jesus promised his followers that

they would “receive power (*dynamis*) when the Holy Spirit (*to hagion pneuma*) has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). Thus, the infant church (and “all flesh” according to Acts 2:17) were to be “covered” and “filled” by God’s Spirit (Acts 2:4) as Mary had been at the Annunciation, and as the Tabernacle and Temple had been before her.

In this power, beginning from Jerusalem the Temple-city (Lk 24:47b), the church would go forth beyond the Temple to become witnesses “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Far into the distant future, there stretched the hope that, yet again, the *kabod* would return with the glorified and ascended Jesus (Acts 1:11b). For now, “it” had passed with him into the heavenly realm and could only be glimpsed in visions like that of Stephen (Acts 7:55) or Paul (Acts 26:13–15).

In order to sketch what I envisage as a Lucan “Temple theology,” I will attempt to schematize (and summarize) the foregoing narratives and allusions by using very mythological language and envisaging a sort of “cosmic liturgy”: a series of “descents” and “ascents” between a “heavenly realm” and an “earthly realm” involving “the Kabod” [without italics!] (*shekinah, doxa, “glory”*) and “the Spirit” (*ruach, pneuma, dynamis*). In a first movement, the Spirit overshadows Mary and the exiled Kabod descends to Mary’s womb; here the Spirit sends the Kabod “into” Mary who becomes the Temple. The “identity” of the Kabod-Jesus is revealed on the mount of Transfiguration where his forthcoming “departure in Jerusalem” is spoken of. Jesus then sets off toward Jerusalem where, coming from the Mount of Olives, he enters, cleanses, and occupies the Temple; here, the Jerusalem temple *becomes* truly “the Temple” when the Kabod-Jesus returns from “exile.” Jesus is then rejected, arrested, tried, and crucified. Jesus (and with him the Kabod) is about to “depart” for the first time; the Temple curtain is torn, Jesus commits his Spirit into the Father’s hands and dies (a “mini-ascent”). The crucified Jesus is resurrected by God, presumably through the agency of the Spirit. The glorified Risen Christ (i.e., Jesus “permeated” by the Kabod) commissions the disciples to be witnesses, promises the coming of the Spirit, and departs for the

second and final time (his “maxi-ascent”) from the Mount of Olives. He ascends to his Father in heaven where Stephen in a vision later glimpses the Kabod and Jesus “at the right hand of God.”

More importantly, from heaven (presumably) the Spirit descends on Pentecost and is “poured out upon all flesh”; in this movement, it is as though the Kabod is sending the Spirit, a reversal of the Annunciation to Mary. From Jerusalem, city of the Temple, the witness to Jesus is to spread to the “ends of the earth” to include Jews and Gentiles. Now in a very real sense, “Humanity” is becoming the Temple. To this “Temple” is promised the future return of the glorified Jesus-Kabod who at the Parousia “will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11b) and will dwell in the midst of his “truest Temple,” the Spirit-filled human race.

To conclude, we may return to the “Word-Sign” construct with which I began this paper, and try to discern what is “the Word” we may hear from Luke through “the Sign” of the Temple. Put very simply, “the Temple” is ultimately God’s Sign, his assurance to us, that God is willing and able to dwell in the midst of humanity. This is perhaps very close to the Johannine idea of “the Word” who pitches a tent and “dwells among us” (Jn 1:14). In a very real sense, I would affirm, the Temple is the “Sign of Emmanuel”—God is with us.



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.